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*A recent interpretation of the Letter of an Assyrian Princess,*  
—By Dr. CHRISTOPHER JOHNSTON, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.

FEW cuneiform texts—though the assertion is rather a bold one—have been interpreted in so many different ways by different scholars as the brief letter of thirteen lines, K. 1619 b (III R. 16, No. 2; Harper's *Letters*, No. 308), addressed by the Assyrian princess, Šerû'a-eṭerat, to a lady of her father's court. Prof. Sayce, who first attempted to translate it more than twenty years ago in his *Babylonian Literature* (pp. 19, 78), considered it a spelling lesson "received by one of the granddaughters of Ašurbanipal, who is told not to write *umpici*, or to say *impuci*." Prof. Fritz Hommel, of Munich, in his *Geschichte Babyloniens und Assyriens* (Berlin, 1885, p. 694, n. 4), gave a translation of the text, which he regarded as a report from the servant (*abad?*) of the king's daughter to the lady Aššur-šarrat, and explained that in this letter the daughter of King Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni orders the expulsion of her older relative from the harem. Prof. C. P. Tiele, of Leyden, in his *Babylonisch-Assyrische Geschichte* (1880, pp. 406, 413), correctly described the letter as referring to a dispute about precedence ("Rangstreit") between two ladies of the palace, but offered no translation. In 1888 the late distinguished French scholar, Arthur Amiaud, made this text the subject of a paper in the *Babylonian and Oriental Record* (ii. 197 ff.). According to his interpretation, the lady to whom the letter is addressed was the wife of a prince Ašurbanipal, not identical with the famous Sardanapallus, but the son of a King Esarhaddon II., whose existence had been previously asserted by Sayce and Schrader. The theory of the existence of an Esarhaddon II. has, however, long since been abandoned by every Assyriologist, and with it Amiaud's explanation falls to the ground.

In May 1896 I discussed this text in a paper entitled, "The Letter of an Assyrian Princess," which was read before the Johns Hopkins University Philological Association, and was published, the following month, in the *Johns Hopkins University Circulars* (June, 1896, vol. xv.—No. 126, pp. 91 ff.). At

the same time (June 1896), the well known French Assyriologist, Father V. Scheil, published in the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* (xi. 47 ff.) the text of a tablet from his private collection, proving that Sin-šar-iškun, the last king of Assyria, was the son of Sardanapallus, and added in a foot note (p. 49) a translation of the letter of the princess. While Father Scheil's translation differs from my own in some particulars, we arrived at the same conclusion as regards the writer of the letter. In fact, up to this time it had never occurred to anyone to doubt that the writer of the letter was the daughter of king Ašur-etil-ilâni, the son of Sardanapallus, and the last king but one of Assyria.

During the past year, however, Dr. Hugo Winckler of Berlin, the accomplished editor and translator of the Amarna Letters, published, in his *Altorientalische Forschungen* (1898, 2d Ser. i. 53-59), a paper entitled "Sareser und Esarhaddon," in which our text is interpreted from an entirely different point of view. His translation is as follows: "Utterance of the daughter of the king to (the lady) Aššur-šarrat:—Unless you write your letter and confess your fault (?), will not people say, 'Is this (really) the sister of Šerû'a-eṭerat, the great daughter of the harem of Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni, the great king, the mighty king, king of Assyria?' And you are the daughter of the young wife, the mistress of the household of Ašurbanipal, the great son of the harem of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria."

According to Dr. Winckler's explanation, the writer of the letter was a princess of Assyria in regard to whose birth some doubt or dispute had arisen, and the lady Aššur-šarrat, presumably a nurse, is required to acknowledge her fault and testify that the princess is not the daughter of Ašurbanipal, but the sister of the "great daughter" of king Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni. Against the usual assumption of the identity of this king with the last monarch but one of Assyria, it is objected that no doubt could possibly occur as to whether the writer of the letter—evidently a woman grown—was the daughter of Ašurbanipal, born while he was crown prince (so he is styled in the letter), or of his son and successor, at a time when the latter actually sat upon the throne. It is also considered remarkable that while the successor of Ašurbanipal styles himself, in his own official inscriptions, merely Ašur-etil-ilâni, the fuller form of the name should occur in a private letter. If these premises be granted, the princess must seek another father. In Dr. Winckler's opinion, the solution of

the difficulty is suggested by the so-called Will of Sennacherib (III R. 16, No. 3), wherein mention is made of "my son Esarhaddon, who was afterwards named Ašur-etillu-mukîn-aplu." It is, of course, admitted that Esarhaddon resumed his original name when he ascended the throne of Assyria, but Dr. Winckler, by an ingenious restoration in the fragmentary text S. 1079, would make it appear that the king, before his accession and while acting as governor of Babylon, actually bore the name Ašur-etillu-mukîn-aplu. On these grounds the eminent Berlin Assyriologist would identify King Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni with Esarhaddon, and thinks that the lady was born before her father's accession, during which period circumstances might be conceived to arise tending to cast a doubt upon her birth. The fact that Esarhaddon is mentioned under his usual name in the last line of the letter is explained upon the theory that the first mention of the king (ll. 9-10) is of the nature of a formal official statement, wherein he is called by the name he bore at the time of his daughter's birth, while in the second case he is called by the name he bore at the time the letter was written.

Dr. Winckler's explanation of this difficult text is most ingenious, and anything that comes from the pen of so able an Assyriologist is entitled to a respectful hearing; but in the present case his arguments are not altogether convincing. It is difficult to see how the name Ašur-etillu-mukîn-aplu affords a better identification for Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni, than Ašur-etil-ilâni; the latter in fact, as the simpler, seems preferable. It is perfectly conceivable that a long name might, for practical reasons, be abbreviated even in official documents, while the use of the longer and more sonorous form in the present letter is due to a very obvious purpose. Dr. Winckler himself remarks (p. 57) that this part of the letter has the ring of a formal statement, and he also calls attention (p. 55) to the frequent abbreviation of names in legal documents. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that the king, upon his accession to the throne, fixed upon the shorter form as his official designation. A glance over the list of Assyrian kings shows not a single name composed of more than three words; the majority contain only two. In fact, the employment of long names in official designations would seem to be contrary to Assyrian usage. But quite apart from the historical side of the question, Dr. Winckler's translation is open to objections from a grammatical standpoint—the same objections, for the most part, that I advanced against other translations in my former paper.

*atā* (l. 3) does not mean 'if'; it is properly the imperative of the verb *atā* 'to see,' and is of common occurrence in the letters as an interjection.—The reading *tašātīrī* (l. 3) is impossible, since the preterite of *šaṭāru* 'to write' is not *išṭir* but *išṭur*, and therefore a present *išātīr* would be an anomaly. We must certainly read here, with Delitzsch, *Handwörterbuch*, p. 490<sup>b</sup>, *tasādīrī* from *sadāru* 'to arrange'. The words *duppikī lā tasādīrī* mean literally, "thou dost not (properly) arrange thy tablet," i. e. "thou dost not draw up thy letter in proper form."—That *im-bu* (l. 4) stands for *imbū* is reasonably certain, but the explanation of it as a synonym of *xīṭtu* is more than doubtful. I believe it to be a derivative of the stem *nabū*, with the meaning 'name, title.'<sup>1</sup>—In line 11, *kallāt* cannot be taken as an apposition to *belit bīti*, since two coördinated constructs can never govern a single genitive. *mārat kallāt belit bīti ša Ašurbanipal* can only be construed as a single construct chain, the length of which necessitates the use of *ša*, the sign of the genitive, before the nomen rectum. The whole phrase means, therefore, "the daughter of the daughter-in-law of Ašurbanipal's wife." This is certainly a rather remarkable expression, but the lady doubtless had her reasons for laying stress upon it. Father Scheil falls into the same error here; for lines 1–10 he practically reproduces Amiaud's version, which I discussed in my former paper.

I see no reason to depart, in any essential particular, from the rendering I proposed three years ago. I still believe that the text should be transliterated and translated as follows :

<sup>1</sup> *Abīt mārat šarri ana* <sup>2</sup> *sal. al. Aššur-šarrat!*

<sup>3</sup> *Atā duppikī lā tasādīrī,* <sup>4</sup> *imbūkī lā taqābī.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ulā iqābī'a* <sup>6</sup> *mā:* 'Annātū axātsa' *ša*

*sal. Šerū'a-eterat,* <sup>8</sup> *mārtu rabūtu ša bīt-ridūti*

<sup>9</sup> *ša Ašur-etil-ilāni-ukīnni,* <sup>10</sup> *šarru rabū, šarru dannu, šar kiššati, šar māt Aššur?*

<sup>11</sup> *U atī mārat kallāt belit bīti ša Asur-ban-apal,*

<sup>12</sup> *mār-šarri rabū ša bīt-ridūti,* <sup>13</sup> *ša Ašur-axa-iddina, šar māt Aššur.*

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<sup>1</sup> See Delitzsch, *Assyr. Grammatik*, § 65, No. 30, and note especially *imbūbu* 'flute,' in which we have the same partial assimilation of the nasal.

## TRANSLATION.

Message of the King's daughter to Aššur-šarrat !  
 Thou dost not (properly) address thy letter (sent to me),  
 nor use the title (befitting thy station). (People)  
 might say, "Is this the sister of Šerû'a-eterat,  
 the eldest daughter of the harem of  
 Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni, the great king, the  
 mighty king, king of hosts, king of Assyria ?"  
 But thou art (simply) the daughter of  
 of the daughter-in-law of the wife of Ašurbanapal,  
 eldest son of the harem of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria.

The lady Aššur-šarrat would seem to have written to the princess Šerû'a-eterat a letter in which she addressed her as 'sister,' a familiarity which the latter rebukes as an impertinence, and refers the indiscreet lady to her proper place. The peculiar phrase, "daughter of the daughter-in-law of Ašurbanapal's wife," doubtless contains some keen thrust, the point of which escapes us owing to our ignorance of the circumstances to which it refers, though we may be sure that Aššur-šarrat understood it well enough. A number of explanations suggest themselves, all equally conjectural ; but so much is clear, that the words are intended to define Aššur-šarrat's position, and to emphasize the fact that she is not entitled to address as 'sister' the eldest daughter of King Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni. Under these circumstances, the employment of the longer form of the king's name, instead of his shorter official designation, Ašur-etil-ilâni, becomes quite intelligible. The princess wishes to enhance her own dignity, and selects the longer name as being more impressive. It is certainly rather striking that Ašurbanipal is called, not king of Assyria, but *mâr šarri rabû ša bît ridûti*. This may be due to the fact that Aššur-šarrat's relationship with King Sardanapallus is to be traced back to the time preceding his accession to the throne. She may, for example, have been descended from a wife who was divorced before he became king. It was, moreover, no part of the princess' intention to magnify the position or pedigree of her correspondent. On the other hand, it should be noted that Ašurbanapal, in his longest and most elaborate inscription, deliberately selects this very title in preference to the usual official title of Assyrian kings.

In the same paper, Dr. Winckler cites the fragment of a letter (82-5-22, 106) addressed by one Narâm-Sin to LUGAL KAR *mât Aššur* (*šar kiššat, šar mâtāti bel'ja*), which he is inclined to take as a proper name and to read *Šar-eṭir mât Aššur*. This king he would identify with the biblical Shareser, the murderer of his father Sennacherib and rival of his brother Esarhaddon. The fact that he is styled in the fragment *šar kiššati* is taken as a confirmation of this view, since this title pertained specially to the northwestern part of Assyria, where Shareser is believed to have held out longest after his expulsion from Nineveh. It is also pointed out as a remarkable coincidence that this title, *šar kiššati*, is omitted from the titles of Ašur-etil-ilâni-ukînni in the letter of the princess; and Dr. Winckler would therefore place the latter's birth in 681 B. C., during the time of her father's conflict with his brother. There are a number of objections to this ingenious hypothesis, but it is only necessary to mention two of them. In the first place, it is very unusual to find letters addressed to kings by name, and, as the determinative of a proper name is wanting, it is at least equally possible that the supposed name *Šar-eṭir-mât Aššur* may be merely a title,—*Šarru eṭir mât Aššur*, "the king, protector of Assyria," etc. In the second place, the title *Šar kiššati* is *not* wanting in the letter of the princess, but stands very distinctly both in III R. 16 and in Harper's *Letters*, No. 308. I can hardly believe that Dr. Winckler's reading is due to a special collation of the text made by him, since in that case he would surely have stated the fact.